**Are You Afraid of Mary “Co-redemptrix”?**

By Dr. Mark Miravalle • July 15, 2011 • Articles, Co-redemptrix & Fifth Marian Dogma • Comments Off on Are You Afraid of Mary “Co-redemptrix”?

What is your first response when you hear someone refer to the mother of Jesus Christ as the “Co-redemptrix”?

Extreme? Excessive pietism, even if well-intended? Heresy? Only Jesus is the Redeemer. If not directly heresy, then extremely dangerous? At least anti-ecumenical?

Now let’s look at some people who have in fact called the Virgin Mary the Co-redemptrix: John Paul II (on six different occasions); Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta; St. Padre Pio, stigmatic wonder worker of the 20th century; Sr. Lucia, the Fatima visionary; St. Francis Cabrini, the first American citizen to be canonized; St. Jose Maria Escriva, founder of the Opus Dei; St. Edith Stein, co-patroness of Europe; papal theologians Cardinals Ciappi and Cottier; contemporary Church leaders such as Cardinal Schönborn, General Secretary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church; Mother Angelica, foundress of worldwide Catholic television and radio network EWTN; and a host of other saints, popes, mystics, prelates, theologians, and doctors of the Church, and lay leaders, with an ecclesial line of succession dating back to the 14th century.

Do we see dangerous extremism, heresy, or any anti-ecumenical spirit in people like John Paul II and Mother Teresa? Would saints like Padre Pio and Mother Cabrini participate in Marian excess to the detriment of Jesus and his Church? Would Cristoph Cardinal Schönborn, general editor of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, use and defend the Co-redemptrix title if it were in any way unorthodox or theologically questionable? Would a Fatima visionary use, explain and defend the Co-redemptrix title six times in her last great writing, Calls from the Message of Fatima, when doing so would be offensive to the Holy See, who granted the imprimatur to her book? Or, even more, to Our Lady herself, with whom Sr. Lucia experienced mystical communications for decades?

Why, then, would we be afraid of calling Mary the Co-redemptrix with Jesus, the divine Redeemer of humanity, when these pontiffs, saints, theologians and mystics for the past 700 years have been doing so?

What do people like John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Padre Pio and the throng of saints, mystics, and popes, precisely mean when they say that Mary is the Co-redemptrix? First of all, let’s be clear as to what do they not mean: 1.) They do not mean that Mary is equal to Jesus. 2.) They do not mean that Mary has an equal share in the redemption of the human family. This would indeed be heresy.

What they do mean when they refer to the Mother of Christ as the Co-redemptrix is that Mary uniquely cooperated with Jesus and entirely subordinate to and dependent upon Jesus, in the historic work of Redemption.

Let’s define our terms. What is Redemption? Redemption is the saving act of Jesus Christ, through his life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection, repairing our relationship with the Father by offering just compensation for the sins of humanity, and thus restoring the possibility of sanctifying grace, and friendship between God and humanity, which results in the inheritance of heaven.

The term, “redemption,” derives from the Latin, redimere, and literally means “to buy back.” Jesus, through the merits of his passion, death, and resurrection buys us back from the bondage of Satan and the debt of original sin.

Now the question remains: can a human creature participate in this divine historic redemptive work of Jesus Christ?

It is important to remember that the Redemption of Jesus Christ is an act of restoring what was lost by two human beings, Adam and Eve. Although Adam, as father of the human race, was principally responsible for the original sin passed on to his descendants (cf. Rom 5:12), Eve also has an instrumental though secondary role in the loss of grace for the human family (cf. Gen 3:6). This is why the Fathers of the Church referred to Mary as the “New Eve” or “Second Eve,” since through her obedience with Jesus Christ the “New Adam” (cf. 1 Cor 15:45), she became in the words of the 2nd century Church Father, St. Irenaeus the “cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race” (Adv. Haer. III, 22, 4: PG 7, 989 A).

But can a human creature participate in a divine act, such as the divine act of Redemption?

Let us first examine ourselves. Can you or I as creatures positively participate in the salvation of someone else by our cooperation? By our prayers, by our good works, by our sacrifices, but our Christian witness, have we done anything that assisted in the “buying back” of another person from the bondage of Satan through the grace of Jesus Christ?

If you are a father or a mother and have raised your children in the Christian faith and brought your children to baptism into the divine life of Jesus, did you not cooperate in their Redemption in Christ? What about if you are a priest or minister who has a role in baptizing and distributing the other sacraments of Jesus? Do you not participate in the redemption of other people, even though, once again, it is completely dependent upon Jesus Christ, the only and all necessary divine Redeemer?

Every time you pray for someone to say yes to Christ; every time you evangelize Christ by word or example; every time you pray to sustain a family member in faith during a time of crisis; every time you pray for perfect strangers who will die this day to accept their Redeemer during their final earthly breath—in all these prayers and works of Christian intercession, you are cooperating in the Redemption of another human being. You are participating in the application of the saving work of Jesus Christ in buying back members of the human family from Satan and sin.

While it is true that none of us participate in the obtaining of the graces of Redemption merited by Jesus at Calvary, every Christian is nonetheless called to participate in the distribution of his redemptive graces through prayer, sacrifices, and works of faith, hope, and love (cf. Col. 1:24). It is our Christian responsibility and obligation precisely to participate in redemptive work of Jesus Christ. This is why Pope John Paul II called all Christians to become “co-redeemers in Christ.”

If we, therefore, can and should cooperate in the redemption of others, as long as it is absolutely clear, once again, that it is first and in every way dependent upon the redemption wrought by Christ, the one mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2:5), then why would there be a problem with the Mother of Jesus cooperating in the Christian Redemption of others as well?

In fact, does not the Bible reveal that the Mother of Jesus cooperated in the historic act of Jesus’ Redemption like no other creature?

At the Annunciation (Lk 1:38), when Mary says yes to the angel Gabriel to become the Mother of Jesus, can we not say that she uniquely contributes to the mission of Redemption by giving to the Redeemer, the very instrument of Redemption – his human body? Hebrews 10:10 tells us that we are “sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The instrument of Redemption was given personally and intimately to the Redeemer by Mary. What other creature, in virtue of the Incarnation alone, could claim to have a more direct and proximate cooperation with Jesus in his redemptive mission? But it does not stop there.

When the infant Christ is presented by Mary in the Temple and the prophet Simeon identifies Jesus as the “sign of contradiction” who will fulfill his redemptive mission (Lk. 2:25-35), Simeon then refers through the power of the Holy Spirit to Mary’s own unique suffering with Jesus in the work of Redemption: “… and a sword shall pierce through your own soul, too” (Lk 2:35).

Scripture explicitly reveals that Mary will have a unique role of suffering with Jesus—the piercing of her heart—because she is so closely and uniquely a cooperator with the Redeemer. What mother would not suffer in seeing her beloved child die horrifically on the cross, especially if her child was a divine, innocent offering sacrificed for the redemption of the world?

Ultimately, the climactic hour of human Redemption takes place at Calvary (John 19). What happens at Calvary? Jesus is crucified, dies and offers his life in just compensation for the sins of humanity. Mary, Scripture testifies, is present, for the fulfillment of the self-same mission of Redemption. What is happening in the heart of Mary? She is faithfully offering the suffering of her Son, joined with her own, in obedience to the Father’s plan for Redemption. As a result of her unparalleled suffering with the Redeemer, the dying Christ gives, as his final gift to John and to all who seek to be beloved disciples of Christ, the gift of his coredemptive mother to be our own: “Woman, behold your son … Behold, your mother” (Jn 19:26-27).

Regarding both the Incarnation and the Redemption, the Bible reveals that Mary uniquely cooperated with Jesus in the historic work of Redemption. It is little wonder that as a result of her unparalleled sharing in the obtaining of the graces of Redemption, that God would see fit to grant the Mother of the Redeemer the privileged role of the distribution of the graces of Redemption as the spiritual mother of all peoples (cf. Lk 1:38; Jn 2:1-10; Jn 19:25-27; Rev 12:1).

“Crucified spiritually with her crucified Son …. Mary’s role as Co-redemptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son.” Pope John Paul II (Jan. 31, 1985)

“Mary is our Co-redemptrix with Jesus. She gave Jesus his body and suffered with him at the foot of the cross.” Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, (August 14, 1984)

Are you afraid to call Mary the Co-redemptrix? You shouldn’t be. John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Padre Pio, Sr. Lucia, and the endless list of other saints, mystics, popes, theologians, and Christian faithful who refer to her as Co-redemptrix do so with the assurance of Scripture, the Papal Magisterium, and the consolation of the Holy Spirit. It is safe, it is true, and it is a title that she overwhelmingly deserves in virtue of the greatest human suffering in the history of man after that of her Son.

Be not afraid of Mary Co-redemptrix.

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